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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000566

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E.O. 12958: DECL: AFTER KOREAN REUNIFICATION
TAGS: PGOV PREL KS KN
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH VFM KWON JONG-RAK

Classified By: Ambassador Vershbow. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with the Ambassador on March 19, Vice Foreign Minister Kwon Jong-rak discussed a wide range of topics including the upcoming summit in Washington and the associated joint statement. Paralleling statements made by NSA Kim Byung-kook, who was then in Washington discussing the same topic, Kwon said that the ROK preferred to release a broad but concise statement in April in support of a broader strategic alliance between the U.S. and the ROK, and then release a more detailed statement (to be developed by DOD and State experts) in July, when a second summit is likely to be held. On the KORUS FTA, the Ambassador said it would be helpful for President Lee to find time to meet individually with key Congressional leaders to voice the ROK's support for the FTA and update their image of Korea and the ROK-U.S. alliance.

¶12. (C) Turning to the Six-Party Talks, Kwon said that since North Korea had missed the December 31 deadline to deliver a complete and correct declaration of the nuclear capabilities, the other five parties had spoken too softly on the issue. Kwon said he had encouraged President Lee to issue the statement that South Korea "regretted that North Korea missed the deadline" and hoped that other parties would also be more vocal in encouraging North Korea to fulfill its obligations. On humanitarian aid, Kwon said that the ROK would not link it to denuclearization, but the Lee government would define humanitarian aid much more narrowly than Roh's had. In conclusion, the Ambassador inquired as to when the ROK planned to make a formal decision on recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. Kwon said that they have been studying this issue closely and were likely to make an announcement "sooner than later" as the ROK had eventually decided to support Kosovo's independence. The Ambassador also delivered demarches urging full participation in PSI and support for Israeli participation in the JUSCANZ group which will be reported septel. END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT LEE'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON

¶13. (C) In his March 19 meeting with the Ambassador, Vice Foreign Minister Kwon Jong-rak reiterated the ROK's view that it would be better to issue a broad statement during the April summit and then a more detailed declaration following a likely second summit in July. In the time between the April and July summits, Kwon suggested that the ROK and U.S. hold "high-level consultations" at the Deputy and Vice Minister

levels while the Ministry of National Defense (MND) would work with the Department of Defense (DOD) to craft a statement focusing on the military alliance. The Ambassador agreed that utilizing the Security Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP) and the Security Policy Initiative (SPI) fora would be useful to flesh out the details of the July summit statement and a vision for the alliance.

¶4. (C) Kwon pointed to the early date of President Lee's trip to Washington as a positive sign in Korea-U.S. relations, noting that former President Kim Dae-jung first visited the U.S. in June and President Roh in May. Additionally, President Bush's invitation to President Lee to stay at Camp David was garnering positive coverage in the Korean media as it shows the close friendship between the two countries. Kwon reiterated the ROKG's hope that President Lee would be given the opportunity to address a joint session of Congress during his time in Washington. The Ambassador said that we supported President Lee's ambition to address Congress, but we also hoped he would take the opportunity while in Washington to meet individually with key Congressional leaders to voice the ROK's support for the FTA and update their image of Korea and the ROK-U.S. alliance. It would be helpful if President Lee delivered a message that the U.S.-Korea alliance transcends issues and short-term interests and has "deeper roots" in shared values and long-term strategic considerations.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador said the U.S. appreciated the new ROK administration's statement at the UN on North Korean Human rights. He suggested that President Lee would find a sympathetic ear in President Bush on the subject. During their time at Camp David, President Lee should look for opportunities for informal discussions on this and other topics where the two Presidents could find common ground. Kwon added the President Lee feels strongly that human rights are an inalienable right. Lee believed that North Korean human rights had to be improved and protected, independent of political considerations. This is one of the most basic human values and therefore it should not be ignored simply for the sake of preserving amicable relations with the North.

SIX-PARTY TALKS

¶6. (C) Kwon lamented that, in the weeks following the missed December 31 deadline for North Korea to submit a complete and correct declaration of their nuclear capabilities, no one has "turned up the heat" on North Korea. The five other parties in the talks have chosen to use positive language rather than criticize the North for the missed deadline. Kwon said he had personally encouraged President Lee to issue the statement that South Korea "regretted that North Korea missed the deadline," and he hoped that other parties would also be more vocal in encouraging North Korea to fulfill their obligations. As President Lee makes the rounds to hold summits with the other members of the Six-Party Talks, it will be a good opportunity to discuss the issue in more detail and show a "united front" to North Korea and encourage them to fulfill their obligations. Participants of the Six-party Talks had delivered approximately 30 percent of their portion of HFO and equivalent materials; but Kwon questioned whether North Korea had shown the same level of commitment in its disablement and declaration efforts. The key is to manage the process and prevent it from becoming a crisis.

¶7. (C) Responding to the first such request from the North under Foreign Minister's Yu's tenure, Kwon said the ROK has agreed to meet with the North during the week of March 23 under the auspices of the Energy and Economic Cooperation Working Group (EECWG) of the Six-party Talks. Kwon characterized the meetings as part of the EECWG but only the ROK and DPRK will be in attendance at the meetings scheduled to be held in the DMZ. The last meeting between the two sides was held in Beijing in January before the new ROK administration was ushered in.

ROK DEFINITION OF HUMANITARIAN AID

¶8. (C) Kwon told the Ambassador that the ROK had not received any official requests from the DPRK for food or fertilizer aid as of yet. As President Lee had said throughout his campaign, the ROK would define humanitarian aid differently from the previous administration. As previewed in Washington DC by visiting NSA Kim Byung-kook, the ROK will consider humanitarian aid for seasonal or temporary emergency situations such as flooding or drought. But ongoing aid necessitated by chronic food shortages that were the result of systemic problems within the DPRK was not likely to be considered humanitarian assistance, according to Kwon. Kwon was quick to clarify that this new approach did not mean that the ROK would not give some aid in the absence of a natural disaster, but rather the aid would not be automatic as it had been in the past. "If a request is received, we will study it," Kwon explained. In light of recent reports about ROK food aid being diverted into the mouths of the DPRK military, the ROK would insist on better access to monitor the aid.

ROK VIEWS ON KOSOVO

¶9. (C) The Ambassador inquired as to when the ROK planned to make a formal decision on recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. Kwon replied that, as a matter of principle, the ROK supported Kosovo's independence but it was an issue of timing as to when they could make this comment publicly. The ROK has been looking to other countries in Asia, especially Japan, as a guide for their thinking. The ROK will make a decision sooner than later and will let the U.S. know when they have decided to make their public announcement. The Ambassador added his encouragement that it would be better for the ROK to announce their support before Foreign Minister Yu goes to Washington during the week of March 23.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: A career diplomat who joined Lee Myung-bak's campaign late last year, Kwon will be an active vice minister, a departure from his predecessor, Cho Joon-pyo, who played only a minor role in policymaking. Kwon also has substantial experience in U.S. issues due to his service in the ROK Embassy in Washington and the North America Bureau.

VERSHBOW